

**Submission  
No 202**

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING PROCESS IN NEWCASTLE  
AND THE BROADER HUNTER REGION**

**Name:** Name suppressed  
**Date received:** 24/10/2014

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*Partially Confidential*

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The Director

Select Committee on the  
Planning Process in Newcastle 22nd October, 2014  
and the Broader Hunter Region  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney.

I welcome and thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the Select Committee.

\* There has been no genuine community consultation in planning matters in Newcastle for many years. The business community has had the ear of politicians and local councillors for the same time. One only has to review articles in the Newcastle Herald and NBN television to find the lack of support for residents' views and the wholehearted backing for the "big end of town."

\* Since 2011, when Jim Owen became the State Member for Newcastle, we became disenfranchised. Those interested in the future of the city, as it related to State matters, who went to see our elected member, were told at the outset he "... would not discuss the rail line and its closure". He refused also to talk about other issues including the high rise developments in the CBD. He swore at three polite, intelligent ladies from the Hill, and told other Hill residents that "... if they don't like what is happening they could move out."

It was clear to local residents who approached him for assistance that he was only interested in supporting real estate

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agents, property developers and money making projects.

- \* The planning process is not transparent, nor is it driven by community need. Primarily it is large corporations/developers (eg Rose Corporation, Builders, Brickworks, Stronach GPT etc) who drive the planning process for huge private profit. These corporations have no concern for community amenity or opinion.
- \* Cutting of the rail line at the behest of and to satisfy the greed of GPT is an example of this profit driven motive of big business to the detriment of ordinary citizens. Plans of 2008 show GPT developments occupying the rail land, land owned by the people of NSW and not by GPT.
- \* The State Government announcement of the closure of the rail line on 26-12-14, without providing services to replace the train, is hard to believe to be in the PUBLIC INTEREST. With festivities in Newcastle on New Years Eve, this would have to be the most busy time of year.
- \* A recent announcement by Pru Goward, Minister for Planning indicated that the rail land would have to be sold to developers. As recently as yesterday the Premier made a similar statement. (21.10.14). This seems unnecessary since the sale of the Port of Newcastle is raising far more than anticipated.

- \* There was no mechanism for the people to have input to the sale of the Port. It is as if all State owned assets in Newcastle can be sold off to fund major projects that are mainly in Sydney.
- \* The association of Urban Growth NSW with GPT is a conflict of interest. In addition GPT is principally Singapore owned so profit generated will go out of the country.
- \* Urban Growth NSW is an arm of the NSW government. The NSW government should NOT be setting itself up to be a developer. In the case of DA 2014/323 Newcastle East End Development, Urban Growth NSW is acting as both 'the applicant and consenting authority. The alteration to the LEP for an increase in height limits in Newcastle City Centre is unconscionable.

### Newcastle City Council (NCC)

- \* Developers do not keep to guidelines specified in Council planning DCPs. They are constantly wanting to exceed FSRs, height and bulk limits and site occupancy. Unless they have their way there is threat of action in the Land and Environment Court which can be costly for councils but of small cost to developers who make many millions from large commercial developments. Another reason to exceed guidelines is for commercial viability. The latter is cynical in the extreme considering the potential profits of such enterprises.

Thus Councils are powerless to implement DCP recommendations. State planning statutes are biased towards developers.

\* As an example of the way in which the NCC was operating while Mayor McCloy was in charge take the case of the Coastal Walk from Streslecki Lookout to Bar Beach. \$1.3 million towards the cost of this project was put into the forward estimates by Lord Mayor McCloy without the knowledge or approval of councillors. Proponents of this project included Jim Owen, Neil Slater and Barney Collins (architect). Considering the fact that NCC is applying to increase residential rates over and above that recommended for the next five years, this largesse seems a little unseasonable.

\* Until the most recent Council election NCC was opposed to the closure of the rail line from Wickham to Newcastle. Of interest are the land holdings, adjacent to the line, owned by Mr McCloy.

### Hunter Development Corporation (HDC)

\* HDC is also a State Government quango with huge development powers over a large area of Inner Newcastle and suburbs. In fact it has the power to over-rule NCC and has direct links to NSW government policy makers.

\* Over the years the land area under the jurisdiction of HDC has grown very

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large indeed. What began as a committee to guide the planning for a small area of harbour front land no longer needed by the Department for Railways, has become a powerful real estate developer of State Government land throughout Newcastle.

\* The HDC promised to open the harbour foreshore to the people, however the reality is that a wall of buildings and a privately run car park now cut the public access to the harbour. One only has to look at the eastern end of what was once Railway Department land where there is now public open space to see what could have been if government was enlightened.

\* The "connectivity" argument, put forward by HDC and now the mantra of MS Berejikian and Howard, is a farphy. The delays at the at grade road crossings <sup>are</sup> mainly due to traffic lights rather than railway gates. Even the bus drivers will agree on this. HDC want to make the Hendysuckle Precinct more accessible. So date it has been a bit of a flop. If it does succeed it will be at the expense of the Newcastle CBD which will not function during the 2 or 3 years of the GPT/Urban Growth building program.

\* During the so called "public participation" leading to the decision to close the rail line, HDC ran an on line survey. The transport survey that resulted was

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seriously flawed. Once you logged on to the website your intent automatically became a vote in favour of rail line closure. Users of this site could not say NO to the rail line truncation proposal.

## Rail Line Closure

- \* The developments at Civic (new Courthouse and in 2015 University Campus) which do not have adequate on site parking planned for them, now surely make the rail truncation a short sighted, stupid decision that needs to be redressed.
- \* The public statements being made by government members seem to indicate that they are determined to go ahead with it. Is it because of loss of face if the decision is reversed! Government by cash filled paper bags must still be going on. The entire thing is a fiasco and tinged with spitefulness considering the timing before the March 2015 election.
- \* Findings at ICAC also shed new light on many things going on in Newcastle that involve the State Government decisions on the closure and the potential development of rail land released as result.
- \* Newcastle does not need light rail. It is my belief that NO COSTINGS have been done for the rail to be removed, establishment of light rail and other unanticipated effects of rail line

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closure. Those in government driving these changes have no idea of how to go about it, what the future impacts will be or their influence on the lives of ordinary people. Questions need to be asked in Parliament about detailed costings for these projects.

\* Rather than revitalise the CBD the rail line closure will lead to decline, hardship and perhaps failure for Hunter St businesses. People will use cars to frequent the large retail outlets out of town where parking is free.

\* Changing transport modes at Wickham will lead to reduced public transport use.

\* Buses are an inefficient transport mode. Not only are they polluting, they carry fewer passengers than a train, are delayed because of varying traffic conditions and are more unreliable.

For example the journey from Hamilton to Newcastle East

Train 7 minutes

Bus 20 - 30 minutes.

\* Why spend money on light rail to replace something we already have! DUMB!

Yours faithfully,